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The Reformatory and Choreographic Contributions of Micheal Fokine

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THE REFORMATORY AND CHOREOGRAPHIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF MICHEAL FOKINE

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PREFACE

Many individuals have contributed to the development of dance throughout its history--some as choreographers, some as teachers, and others as performing artists. But there is no personality more significant nor more relevant to dance as we know it today than the Russian artist, Micheal Fokine. Through his artistic insight and genius he laid the foundation for the evolution of modern ballet in the twentieth century. Fokine's lifetime (1880-1942) spanned two centuries and encompassed an era in dance that witnessed a change of emphasis from pure, cold technique to total, stylistic expression. Indeed, he was the most important element in this transformation movement--its founder and chief proponent.

The basis for this new epoch in dance originated from Fokine's proposed reformatory theories created through his desire to revive an art that was being strangled by the strictures of decadent traditions surrounding its practice. His choreographic works developed these reformatory measures into visual, working structures that have been the inspiration behind all men who have succeeded him.

This discussion of Fokine's artistic development will be limited to a period of nine years--1904-1913--which encompasses the

formulation of his reformatory theories on dance, his major choreographic works, and his most significant artistic associations. While the concentration of information will pertain to this above mentioned area, clarity necessitates a brief look, in retrospect, at Fokine's early influences, his academic and artistic education, and his abilities as a performer and instructor. All of these aspects are relevant and necessary in structuring a foundation for the discussion of his development as a reformer and choreographer.

The subsequent chapter will lend itself to a discussion of Fokine's reformatory theories for ballet. First some insights will be provided into their general format--noting his ideas on what dance should portray in contrast to the beliefs popular at that time in the Russian School. An analysis of Isadora Duncan's beliefs and their influence on Fokine will follow which exhibit the areas of thought in which the two innovators differed. The final segment of this discussion will include an enumeration and analysis of Fokine's proposed reformatory measures.

Through the proceeding discussion it will then be possible to make a thorough investigation of Fokine's choreographic products which are the visual applications of his reformatory theories. This section will contain an examination of his choreographic style--its structure and use of music and dancers--and a look at his early choreographic experiments. The concluding segment of the discourse will pertain to the analysis of the Spectacular and National classifications of Fokine's

works with ballets that best exemplify these categories.

The concluding chapter will include a detailed study of the third classification of Fokine's choreographic works--the Classico-Romantic ballet. The work Les Sylphides will be cited as the exemplifying production. Its presentation in this discourse on Fokine's artistic development is significant for two reasons. First, this ballet serves as the best example of Fokine's Classico-Romantic works, and secondly, it is the most complete embodiment of his suggested reforms on ballet and his particular choreographic style.

The discussion will commence with a citation of the evolutionary stages which led to the final conception of Les Sylphides. This development will be demonstrated through the discussion of the ballet's two major renditions--both called Chopinianna. Each of these versions will be examined according to thematic concept, musical structure and choreographic design. The major part of the discourse, however, will concentrate on the second rendition of Chopinianna as it is the final stage of the ballet's development and the concept which is most readily equated with Les Sylphides. The discussion will terminate with an explanation of the events which surrounded Fokine's recession in choreographic inspiration and productivity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

FOUNDATIONS FOR ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT

Perhaps the most interesting and relevant material surrounding Micheal Fokine's early childhood was that which pertained to the influences by members of his immediate family. Fokine considered every member of his family to have had an individual and vital influence on his eventual theatrical career. His mother endowed him with her incessant love for the theatre, while on the other hand, Fokine's father, a businessman, considered aspects of the theatre and ballet as "frivolous" and "silly." When the idea of sending young Micheal to the Imperial Russian Ballet School was first suggested, his father muttered angrily, "I don't want my Mimotchka to be a 'hoofer.'" His father's all but respectful views on ballet afforded Fokine with his critical approach to the dance and later inspired his reforms and choreographic innovations.[1]

Fokine's oldest brother Vladimir, a Russian comedy actor, demonstrated through his dedication to the theatre that it demanded hard work and artistic transformation. This realization that the theatre

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[1]Micheal Fokine, Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master, trans. Vitale Fokine, ed. Anatole Chujoy (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1961), p. 5.

was a medium of constant creation and change laid the foundation for Fokine to recognize the error of the ballet in which dancers found it easy not to attempt alteration of their appearances, movements and dances. They neglected the essential substance of art--"the gift of transforming reality." His brother Alexander contributed to Fokine's physical development and also to his competitive spirit--two of the most essential elements for a male dancer to possess. [1]

Of all these family influences, however, Fokine held as most valuable those of his brother Kolia. He was a teacher by nature and always eager to share his vast knowledge of all subjects. He had an equally eager listener in his younger brother Micheal. Kolia stimulated Fokine's imagination and enriched him with information on all aspects of life. [2]

Because of financial problems brought on by his father's increasing age and ill-health, Fokine was enrolled in the Imperial Russian Ballet School at the age of eight. Here he would receive a free education and the security of a job until retirement. [3]

Through his outstanding assemblage of teachers Fokine was afforded with the best possible education in the traditional past. To this was added his performing experience gained through such vehicles as the ballets of Marius Petipa, Saint-Léon, Coralli and the remaining

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[1]Ibid., p. 7. [2]Ibid., p. 9. [3]Ibid., p. 6.

nineteenth century repertoire. Successively, Fokine's teachers included Platon Karsavin (father of great Russian ballerina and contemporary of Fokine, Tamara Karsavina), Paul Gerdt, Nicholas Legat, Nikolai Volkov, Christian Johansson, Marius Petipa, Lev Ivanov and Enrico Cecchetti.[1] He was educated in the vocabulary of classic, romantic, demi-character and character dance. Fokine's instructors were immensely impressed by his precocity and considered him to be the top student in his class. At the age of thirteen he distinguished himself by his fine portrayal of Luke in Lev Ivanov's production of The Magic Flute.[2]

Fokine excelled not only in dance, but in other artistic and academic classes as well. Possessing a deep love and appreciation for art, he spent much of his free time in museums. Here he studied and noted historical and stylistic details of movement, costume, furniture and scenery. Also, Fokine frequented libraries, where he read as much as possible in Russian and foreign literature and the histories of theatre and art. His complete education in all fields in or related to the arts prepared him for his future career as a choreographer.[3]

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[1]Lincoln Kirstein, Dance (New York: Dance Horizons, 1969), p. 272.

[2]Joan Lawson, A History of Ballet and its Makers (London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons Ltd., 1964), p. 96.

[3]Lawson, loc. cit.

Finishing school in 1898, Fokine was given his début that same year on April 26, at the Maryinsky Theatre. The ballet to be presented was Paquita by Minkus in which Fokine along with Lubov Egorova, Julie Sedova and Anatole Obukhov, all fellow graduates, were to perform the pas de quatre. Fokine was considered an outstanding pupil and from the time of his graduation from the Imperial School was given many important roles without having to pass through the levels of the corps de ballet--which was at that time unprecedented.[1]

As a performer Fokine possessed many gifts--beautiful style, expressiveness and projection. He could assume a wide and diversified range of roles, comic and heroic parts, and had mastered both the classical and character styles in dance.[2] Already an exceptional artist, Fokine developed into one of the finest dancers in the Imperial Theatres. It has been said that he surpassed even Vaslav Nijinsky, famous Russian danseur, in many roles that Fokine created for himself, but which Nijinsky made famous in Western Europe.[3]

Fokine achieved for male dancers a position higher than that of the female. This gave the danseurs aspects that were positive

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[1]Ivor Guest, The Dancer's Heritage (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), p. 68.

[2]Nataliia Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1966), p. 173.

[3]Kirstein, loc. cit.

and virile. The rise in status was significant considering the almost entire elimination of the male dancer from ballets of the Romantic Period (1830-1850). The danseur had not been held in such high esteem since the days of Auguste Vestris, dancer and choreographer of the Pre-romantic Era in ballet.[1]

All of the ballets that Fokine appeared in during his association with the Maryinsky were of the old, traditional style--Spectacular. The themes were vehicles for technical brilliance; the corps de ballet was used virtually as background; and the prima ballerina had enough pull that on a mere whim she could effect a change in costumes, music or scenery. These ballets contained all of the trappings dictated by the rigid doctrine of stagnant tradition which permeated the classical ballet of that epoch. All this Fokine was soon to take action against in his reforms.[2]

At the young age of twenty-two, having already firmly established himself as a performer, Fokine was given his first opportunity to teach in the Imperial Russian School.[3] This initial appointment entrusted to him the junior-level ballet technique class, and was soon followed by a promotion to professor which placed him in charge of the

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Francis Gadan and Robert Millard (eds.), Dictionary of Modern Ballet (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1959), p. 148.

[3]Kirstein, loc. cit.

senior girl's class and the men's class. Fokine distinguished himself as an "original" teacher and included in his working methods a forecast of his later reformatory theories for ballet. As a teacher he placed less importance on technique and more on individual expression and the development of the students' creative ability, encouraged free improvisation and taught technique as a means and not an end in itself.[1] Of his students Fokine required intelligent understanding, powers of interpretation and a sensitive feeling for music--all of which enabled them to understand how and why they moved. In her book, A History of Ballet and Its Makers, Joan Lawson quotes Gorshkova, a student of Fokine, as saying concerning Fokine the teacher, "He demanded . . . the maintainence of a style. For lack of style he was ready to bite one's head off."[2]

Fokine used his classes as a laboratory. Here he molded his students both mentally and physically--inspiring, stimulating, demanding that they utilize their minds as well as their bodies in the art of dance. This resulted in the creation of dancers in whose hands he laid the formula for his particular choreographic style.

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[1]Gadan and Millard, loc. cit.

[2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 97.

CHAPTER II

REFORMATORY THEORIES IN BALLET

Through the discussion of Fokine's childhood influences, training, performing ability and teaching experience contained in the previous chapter, the foundation has been laid upon which it is now possible to construct a most important phase of Fokine's artistic development. This phase pertains to the formulation of his reformatory theories on dance. To more fully understand this evolution of ideas and their effect on his later developed choreographic style, it will be necessary to first look at the conditions prevalent in the Imperial Russian School which spurred Fokine to effect his subsequent reforms. In addition some insight will be provided into the relevancy and irrelevancy of American dancer Isadora Duncan's philosophies to Fokine and his beliefs. The discussion will terminate with the actual noting and explanation of his proposed reformatory measures.

Through his reforms Fokine cleared away the half-century of dead convention that followed the decline of the "Golden Age" of Romantic Ballet (1830-1850) and re-established dance as a living art. The revolt that he instigated against the trappings of the pseudo-classic tradition was similar to that which had precipitated the Romantic Era

at the inception of the nineteenth century. Many saw his ideas as the logical consequence of the Romantic movement in dance.[1]

Fokine desired to do away with the rigid traditions of the formal ballet, the fairy tales and fantasies of the previous epoch of Petipa that had nothing to do with human feelings and to replace them with relevant emotions and direct actions.[2] He wished to devise different plastique or stylistic forms, idioms and costumes for ballets that differed in style and to promote the use of the technical virtuosity propagated by Petipa not as an end in itself, but as an instrument with which to attain his goals of total expression in dance. This previously procured technical progress had produced a decreased awareness of the flexibility and use of the upper body. The essence of Fokine's whole reform movement was based on the realization that art should be expressive and that the means of expression and its style should be taken directly from the content of a given ballet.[3]

Fokine was responsible for a new stage in the evolution of ballet; however, due to the traditional basis on which the Russian

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[1]Fernau Hall, World Dance (New York: A. A. Wyn, Inc., n.d.), pp. 86-87.

[2]Hans Verwer, Guide to the Ballet, trans. Henry Mills (United States: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 82.

[3]Agnes DeMille, The Book of the Dance (New York: Golden Press, 1963), p. 72.

Theatres were operated, he could realize his reformatory theories only gradually. The attitude that he set forth concerning the confines of the traditional past was antagonistic, and he virtually stood alone--apart from fellow members of the Maryinsky Theatre in his views.[1] But Fokine could not follow unquestioningly the paths set by his predecessors. He was an intelligent man and thought his own thoughts. He believed that dance had become sterile due to customs and tradition and feared that if dance remained in this static condition, it would be doomed and creative expression would vanish.[2]

Mime--the language of the hands--had been reduced to a type of sign language and the system of seniority, demanding that the ballerina be shown to the best effect, hindered choreographers from creating an overall, harmonious effect in any given ballet. The ballerina's costume remained strictly based on the tutu with no attempt made at alteration or transformation to comply with a change in choreographic style.[3]

In his book, Dance, Lincoln Kirstein presented a statement made by Fokine in 1904, which demonstrated his doubts concerning the stagnant elements of ballet in the Imperial Theatres at that time:

Why . . . in an Egyptian ballet were the dancers in ballet

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[1]Tamara Karsavina, Theatre Street (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1961), p. 169.

[2]Cyril Swinson, Guidebook to the Ballet (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1961), p. 46.

[3]Guest, The Dancer's Heritage, p. 68.

> costume and the supers in the dress of the period? Why did a certain dancer execute such and such difficult steps, what were they intended to express, for surely if dancing were not expressive it became acrobatic, mechanical, and meaningless? Why in ballet was a psychological feeling always expressed by a fixed gesture or a series of gestures which neither described nor symbolized anything? Why must the arms be always rounded, the elbows always held sideways parallel to the audience, the back straight, and the feet always turned out with the heels to the front? Why was ballet technique limited to the movements of the lower limbs and a few conventional positions of the arms, when the whole body should be expressive to the last muscle? Why did a dancer rise sur les pointes not to convey the impression that she was rising from the ground, but in order to astonish the audience with her strength and endurance? Why was the style of a dance always inharmonious with that of the theme, its costume, and its period?

To each question posed by Fokine, the stereotyped answer was, "Because it is tradition."[1]

RELEVANCY OF ISADORA DUNCAN'S PHILOSOPHIES TO FOKINE'S REFORMS

Many believed that Fokine was inspired by Isadora Duncan, American dancer and founder of the modern idiom in dance, to effect his reformatory theories on ballet. While it was true that Fokine sympathized with Duncan's efforts to breathe life back into dance, it was a mistake to suggest that his inspiration came solely and directly from her. The condition of classical theatrical dance in Russia disturbed Fokine, as it did Duncan--but differently.[2]

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[1] Kirstein, Dance, p. 273.

[2] Ibid., p. 272.

Duncan first appeared in St. Petersburg in 1905. Her use of music by Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert was considered revolutionary because it was previously thought to be undanceable. Duncan's costumes were also thought to be avant-garde by the standards of costuming present during that time at the Imperial Theatres in St. Petersburg. They consisted of transparent tunics after the Greeks--rather than the tights and ballet slippers of the conventional and accepted dance costume.[1]

Duncan's interpretation of dance was based on a return to Ancient Greece through the study of Grecian vase paintings and termed La Danse Antique in which the chief aim was to bring dance back to its primitive form.[2] Her style of interpretation was not related to the art of dance in the least sense. Moreover, it manifested itself more as an attack on the traditions of ballet than as a form of dance. Duncan's relationship to theatrical dance was incidental; she used the stage merely as an opportunity to express her attitudes toward life in general.[3]

Duncan felt the staleness that permeated the atmosphere of the Russian School where tradition was the controlling factor. However,

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[1]Verwer, op. cit., p. 81.

[2]Romola Nijinsky, Nijinsky (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934), p. 48.

[3]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 272.

she attempted to destroy all tradition in one blow and left no method to take its place--only emotion.[1]

Fokine sympathized with Duncan's wish to free dance from the shackles of binding tradition, but he could never accept her ignorance of academic rules. Unlike Duncan, who chose to attack ballet and its rigid traditions, Fokine used the existing form of classical dance to give expression to direct human feelings and sentiments. As any great artist, Fokine realized that the advancement of dance, as of any art, did not dictate the annihilation of previous achievements. The neglect of this premise caused earlier protestants against the restrictions of the classical tradition to fail where Fokine succeeded.[2] He believed that:

> There could only be evolution and not revolution in art. . . . Every art must have its rules, but whoever wishes to develop and further his ideas, must dare to dispense with conventions which grow up around the basic principles of that art.[3]

Fokine, unlike Duncan, labored constantly in the confining stagnant atmosphere of the Imperial Theatre. He knew in what areas the staleness lay and set out to alter these regions through existing channels--the given technique and the marvelous human instruments provided among the dancers. Fokine put them to uses for which they were well-suited but as yet had never been employed.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 273. [2] Nijinsky, op. cit., p. 49.

[3] Lawson, A History of Ballet and Its Makers, p. 97.

[4] Kirstein, loc. cit.

Both Fokine and Duncan were involved in this "revolt" which was demonstrated in two wings--one led by Duncan which advocated a complete break with classical technique, and one led by Fokine which retained classical technique as the basis for choreography. The two factions influenced each other but retained their autonomy.[1]

When citing the amount of influence that Duncan exercised over Fokine, it is essential to remember that he had already brought his reformatory ideas to the attention of the Imperial Theatre Administration. Through the submission in 1904, of the scenario of his ballet Daphnis and Chlŏe, to which was attached a forecast of his reforms in the form of production instructions, Fokine had already set his ideas into action long before Duncan's appearance in St. Petersburg in 1905.[5]

ENUMERATION AND ANALYSIS OF REFORMATORY THEORIES

At first Fokine's demands for reform were ignored by the officials of the Imperial Theatres. However, within five years these reformatory measures would affect the creation and presentation of ballets from St. Petersburg to Paris.[3]

Fokine, in his suggestions, stated that it was impossible to assemble mechanical combinations of ready-made steps. Choreographers

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[1]Hall, loc. cit.

[2]Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, p. 176.

[3]Kirstein, loc. cit.

had to envisage a genuine expression to suit a certain libretto's theme and include only movements that adhered to that expression. Technical steps were not to be included just for the sake of showing-off the dancer's virtuosity. Each new ballet had to dictate a change in technique which coincided with its style, music and tenor, with the full realization that the story was no longer a pretext for dancing, but a theme which demanded appropriate movement and style. In determining this "style" he held archeological sources to be the only reliable references from which to gain information.[1]

Fokine propounded that neither dancing nor mimed gesture had any relevance except to portray dramatic action. Gesture was no longer to be used as a means of utilizing empty stage space or as a theatrical habit. Formalized gesture was permissible but only when the style of the ballet called for it. No longer was the use of gesticulation an accepted excuse for giving motion to an otherwise immobile figure; the entire body had to be used as an expressive instrument. In essence, Fokine advocated a return to natural expressive movements of the hands and arms and demanded that his dancers perform these movements with true sincerity and feeling to expedite the use of the entire body as a means of expression.[2]

Fokine insisted on a participant troupe. He felt that the

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[1] Ibid. [2] Ibid.

corps de ballet, groups of dancers in ensemble, should be used expressively as a unit and not merely as a decorative background for one or two technicians. He advocated an asymmetrical rather than a symmetrical treatment in the arrangement of corps groups on the stage. This added visual variation and dynamics in choreographic patterns. [1]

Concerning the ballet production as a whole, Fokine demanded an unbreeched association between dancing and the related arts of music and painting. [2] More than ever before, it was necessary for dance and music to gain an intimate relationship one with the other. Fokine said concerning the importance of this relationship:

> Music is not the mere accompaniment of a rhythmic step, but an organic part of a dance, the quality of choreographic inspiration is determined by the quality of the music. [3]

Fokine did not deem it a necessity to have special ballet music and submitted that music of any fluency, if it was suited to the theme and style of the ballet, was useful. [4]

Fokine considered the previous mode of costuming with no hint of alliance to the theme of the ballet to be unacceptable. He felt that costumes should be directly united with the style dictated by the tenor of the ballet. [5]

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[1] Ibid., p. 274. [2] Ibid.

[3] Karsavina, Theatre Street, p. 169.

[4] Kirstein, loc. cit. [5] Ibid.

In essence, Fokine wished more than anything else to concentrate all aspects of production--theme, music, choreography and décor--into one expressive unit. Because he had all the controlled possibilities of the human structure embodied in his dancers and the intelligent insight to use them to their best advantage, Fokine was able to succeed with his reforms in dance.

CHAPTER III

CHOREOGRAPHIC APPLICATION OF REFORMATORY THEORIES

Through the discussion in Chapter II concerning Fokine's reformatory theories--their origin and the influences behind them--it is now possible to go one step further to an analysis of the tangible results of these reforms embodied in his choreographic works. Fokine's ballets are living monuments to his arduous labors to breathe life back into the art of ballet. The discussion will commence with some insights into his choice of a choreographic career, followed by an explanation of his particular choreographic style, working methods and early choreographic experiments. The concluding section of this discourse will pertain to a description of the general classifications of Fokine's choreographic products and will include the presentation of ballets that best illustrate each creative category.

Although Fokine was considered one of the finest performers at the Maryinsky, he felt that his true talents lay elsewhere. Therefore he began to study for his choreographic diploma under Christian Johansson, Danish dancer-choreographer from the Bournnonville School

in Denmark.[1] For most dancers of Fokine's gifts the normal course of life would have been to dance, teach, receive a certain amount of local fame and retire. But Fokine had another destiny--that of a choreographer. Even as a youth, Fokine knew that ballet had many more potentialities that had not been investigated.[2] Now that he had a plan of action set up in his reformatory measures, he could begin his exploration.

When Fokine was formulating his first choreographic efforts, the ballet in Russia was not degenerate, but static. Being intimately associated with the Russian School, he was able to observe the static rules dictated by tradition, that prevented choreographers from realizing their art more fully. Ironically, even though his ideas were not in accordance with those of the Imperial Russian School, his early choreographic experiences came through student and charity performances which utilized both the facilities and dancers of the Maryinsky Theatre.[3]

CHOREOGRAPHIC STYLE

Fokine's desire to communicate narrative, descriptive and

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[1]Gadan and Millard, Dictionary of Modern Ballet, p. 148.

[2]Guest, The Dancer's Heritage, p. 68.

[3]Kirstein, Dance, p. 274.

emotional meaning through dance was envisaged through his selection of steps and informative details which were essential to the creation of movements appropriate to a character.[1] He believed that it was necessary for dance to portray man and his feelings--human beings rather than "characters" that provided dancers with new roles. Fokine's ballets could all be termed ballets d'époque--a decorative resurrection of a time passed.[2] He created a novel technique through his ballets d'époque that was essential for the adaptation of every historic period.

Fokine's scope of subject and styles of movement were greater than any previous choreographer. He distinguished himself as the first creator to grasp every historic style and utilize it as an opportunity to dance.[3] He not only drew from historic periods, but also had the ability to devise choreography in every idiom in dance. He was furnished with a rudimentary knowledge of the type of syncopated or broken melody, affected by social and geographical background that constituted the dances of the peoples of the world.[4]

It is interesting to note that in all his thirty years of choreographic labors, Fokine never once conceived a ballet that was based on a contemporary theme. This is due mainly to the fact that Fokine

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[1]Lawson, A History of Ballet and Its Makers, p. 105.

[2]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 275. [3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., p. 277.

lived during a period in which events of the past were more keenly felt than everyday experiences. Fokine's past included such places as Persia, India, Egypt, "Old" Russia and the Venice of Veronese: Viennese Biedermier or Le Notre's Versailles, and he interpolated many of these as themes into his ballets.[1]

The ballets of Fokine no longer used classical technique exclusively. The form of plastique used by Fokine sprang from his desire to eliminate the "dualism" of mime and dance. This "dualism" was classified under two headings: mimed-dance and danced-mime. In the first category dance was the major aspect, being completely expressive of the character--his moods and emotions. While in the combination of danced-mime, gesture played the major role. It unfolded the plot and explained the character's actions; however, at the same time it was dancing movement and a part of the total choreographic line--never ceasing to flow throughout the ballet. In essence, there were never any static moments when acting was achieved through dance.[2]

Fokine believed fully in the system of training afforded by classical ballet, for it had been worked out on the basis of anatomical knowledge by generations of teachers. He accepted the use of pointes, turn-out and steps of the danse d'école in classical ballets and in the

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[1]Ibid., p. 274. [2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 104.

"new ballet" that he was creating through his reforms and choreographic works. However, he used classical steps with a novel musicality and subtlety so as to produce complete expressiveness in the dancer.[1] Fokine's knowledge of classical theatrical dance made it possible for him to be inventive with its treatment when necessary. He used this classical technique as a basis for choreographic works. All of his creative products captured the essence of human emotion through the classical dance form, eliminated the rigidity of movement and demanded the use of the whole body in artistic expression.[2] Where previously the legs had been the main concern, the use of the hands, arms and torso was stressed.

Fokine possessed the unique ability of showing the potential talents of those dancers that participated in his ballets, many of whom became great artists through his choreography. He utilized the physical traits and personalities of his dancers when he created. He analyzed every characterization and gesture and used the individuality of the dancer's physical and personal traits as an artist would use color, shaping and re-shaping to a particular capability.[3] This was perhaps part of the reason that in succeeding re-stagings of his ballets, minus

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[1]Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, p. 183.

[2]Nijinsky, Nijinsky, p. 49.

[3]DeMille, The Book of the Dance, pp. 216-217.

the original dancers, the execution and interpretation of the characters did not even approach the level of the original conception.

Fokine choreographed equally well for both male and female. However, he had been accused of subordinating the role of the male dancer in favor of that of the female. But Fokine did not discriminate. He reduced, equalized or increased the male or female role as the style of the ballet required and not by any pre-conceived theory of supremacy. Among the greatest roles that he created--the Polovetsky Chief in Prince Igor, the Compte de Beaugency in Pavillion d'Armide, the Slave in Scheherazade, Harlequin in Carnaval and the puppet in Petrouchka--were all male.[1]

Fokine's works possessed many elements reminiscent of his predecessor, Marius Petipa, who ruled for many years as leading choreographer and teacher at the Imperial Russian School, especially in his use of a mass of dancers incasing the entire stage--in which Fokine even surpassed Petipa. His refusal to insert dances anywhere in a ballet, except where they were called for in the plot, might well have reminded Petipa of his teacher and leading choreographer of the Romantic Era, Jules Perrot. Also inspired by Petipa was Fokine's favorite device for a climax which included many lines of dancers performing simple movements that when combined in contrapuntal patterns

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[1]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 277.

created an effect of ever increasing excitement.[1]

Fokine arrived at all of his rehearsals with a complete knowledge of the music and all the choreography in his mind. As he listened to the music, ideas would be visualized in his mind--patterns, steps, combinations. Fokine said concerning his working method:

> Once the score has become a part of me images are formed, which I occasionally fix in little drawings. That is the general plan, but the fantasy comes during rehearsal.[2]

A distinct feature of Fokine's working method was that all of his best works were created in a single burst of choreographic stimulation. He achieved the best results when he could work freely and quickly.[3] Fokine said regarding this peculiarity:

> Many times haste was not only not a hindrance but, on the contrary, I created better when I did not have too much time for meditating on alternations. I created as I felt. Art originates not from pondering but from feeling.[4]

Being usually a rather charming man, Fokine sometimes became ruthless when he created, especially if he was confronted by stupidity or lack of sensitivity. Tamara Karsavina in her book, Theatre Street, related an incident which took place during a rehearsal for Giselle. Karsavina, tired from a previous rehearsal, decided to mark through the general parts of the ballet, performing only particular

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[1]Hall, World Dance, p. 89. [2]Hall, op. cit., p. 92.

[3]Ibid., p. 86.

[4]Fokine, Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master, p. 134.

movements fully. This caused the corps to lag also. Fokine, insulted by Karsavina's apparent lack of interest, released his wrath on her, "How can I blame the corps de ballet if the star herself gives a bad example. Yes! Your example is corrputing, shameful, scandalous." Even leading ballerinas were not spared his "creative temperament."[1]

Fokine's "Golden Age" as a choreographer came between the years 1909-1913.[2] During this time he was associated with Serge Diaghilev, Russian impresario, dilettante of ballet and promoter of the Ballet Russe from 1909-1929. Better conditions than those surrounding the Ballet Russe of Diaghilev could not be asked. Fokine had at his fingertips prominent painters and musicians, and a company of young, eager and well-trained dancers. With such a composite of talents he could create wonders. But Fokine's association with Diaghilev ended abruptly in 1912, due to Diaghilev's change in artistic policy precipitated by Nijinsky's creation of L'Aprés-midi d'une Faune. In this work Nijinsky demonstrated a complete break with the classical idiom, which Fokine could not support, as it had been the basis of all his choreographic work.[3] It must not be forgotten, however, that Fokine's style and the creation of his most famous ballets had been devised before his involvement with Diaghilev.[4]

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[1]Karsavina, Theatre Street, p. 173. [2]Hall, op. cit., p. 94.

[3]Roslavleva, op. cit., p. 181. [4]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 279.

EARLY CHOREOGRAPHIC EXPERIMENTS

Fokine's first three creative efforts were classified as transitory works and included Acis and Galatea, Eunice and Le Cygne (The Dying Swan).[1] The first of these, Acis and Galatea, was a ballet in the Greek style originally produced by Lev Ivanov, choreographer and assistant to Petipa, with music by A. V. Kadletz. It first appeared on the stage in 1905, two months following Duncan's performance of Salle des Nobles.[2]

Although both Acis and Galatea and Salle des Nobles were of Greek origin, there was a definite difference between the concept and structure of the two works. Duncan approached Salle des Nobles as an opportunity to express a mood or emotion. Fokine on the other hand saw Acis and Galatea as a style to be conquered--an era to be re-defined. In preparing this ballet for production, Fokine spent much of his time in libraries, where he studied Schlieman and German reconstructions of Troy, Athens and Mycenae; the Greece of Alma-Tadena, of Sienkiewic's Quo Vadis and others to find an authentic style on which to base his ballet. Many may mock him for relying so heavily on the archeology of his epoch, but they should not forget that he was struggling to end the era of inadequate, icy inertia that had enveloped the Russian

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[1]Nijinsky, op. cit., p. 48.

[2]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 274.

School at that time.[1] The success of Acis and Galatea's presentation indicated to Fokine that continued concentration on choreographic works would best enable him to propound his theories for the reform of ballet.[2]

In 1907, Fokine produced Eunice for the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg. It was regarded as a direct tribute to Duncan but contained a far greater range of movement than could ever have been attained by Duncan and her followers. Eunice was a compromise or uniting of classical technique with the Hellenic revival of Duncan, choreographed after Greek processional dance taken from Grecian vases.[3] Fokine wanted the costumes to be constructed like chitons--costumes of the Greeks--with the dancers performing in bare feet minus the conventional pink tights and ballet slippers. The costumes were assembled to meet Fokine's demands, but the officials of the Imperial Theatres forbade the dancers to appear on stage bare-legged--hence pink tights were worn.[4]

Also among his earlier choreographic labors Fokine devised a short essay for the great Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova. The work that he created was The Dying Swan, choreographed in 1905, to a short

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[1]Ibid. [2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 99.

[3]Karsavina, op. cit., pp. 170-172.

[4]Deryck Lynham, Ballet Then and Now (London: Sylvan Press Ltd., 1947), p. 18.

composition by Saint-Saëns from his work Carnival of Animals. It was first presented for the chorus of the Imperial Opera at a concert in the Hall of Nobles. Fokine saw The Dying Swan as a "dance of the entire body" and wished to propel its meaning--the perpetual longing for life--not at the eyes of the spectators but at their souls. He used it as a vehicle to demonstrate that dance could be expressive even with the most conventional costume. It utilized classical technique and the traditional tutu, but the result was the creation of a poetic essay that has always been associated with Pavlova. Fokine said concerning Pavlova's performance of The Dying Swan, " . . . [a] combination of masterful technique with expressiveness."[1]

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION OF FOKINE'S BALLETS

Fokine's choreographic works generally fall into one of the following three categories: Spectacular, National or Classico-Romantic, each differing according to the origin of the subject matter.[2]

The Spectacular ballets were inspired by literary sources which possessed dramatic action. They usually employed huge casts and many varying divertissements, but Fokine took great care to portray each character or group of characters and their actions in the most economical method. Through this treatment every movement was directly related

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[1]Fokine, op. cit., p. 222. [2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 98.

to the overall theme or storyline of the ballet. Fokine's choreography for this type of ballet contained many new styles of movement and dramatic expressiveness.[1]

Une Nuit d'Egypte (later called Cleopatre when produced for the Diaghilev Ballet Russe in a Paris début) was the first of these Spectacular ballets. The inspiration behind its creation came from the pseudo-oriental melodramatic ballets of the Petipa Era (1875-1900). It demonstrated Fokine's ability to handle materials from varying sources and discipline them so that they had unity with the subject which was in this case the Court of Queen Cleopatra. The plot involved Cleopatra's seduction of her slave, Amoun, his death and his own lover's despair.[2] It was first given as a charity performance at the Maryinsky Theatre in 1908, with music by Antony Stephanovich Arensky. Through his choreography Fokine captured the style and atmosphere of Ancient Egypt superbly.[3]

Also falling under the classification of Spectacular ballet was Fokine's Scheherazade, produced for the Diaghilev Ballet Russe and premiered June 4, 1910, in Paris at The Théâtre du l'Opera. The décor and costumes for this presentation were designed and executed through the joint collaboration of Alexandre Benois and Lèon Bakst, both Russian

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[1]Ibid., p. 105. [2]Ibid.

[3]Swinson, Guidebook to the Ballet, p. 101.

artists associated with the Diaghilev Ballet Russe for many years. The action of the ballet was adapted from the first tale of The Arabian Knights, concerning the Sultan Shahriar and his unfaithful concubine Zobeide. Returning earlier than expected from a hunt, the Sultan discovers that an orgy has taken place in his absence and in his rage orders all participants to be executed--including Zobeide. The music was a cut and adapted version of Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic poem also based on The Arabian Knights.[1]

In Scheherazade, Fokine broke away from the classical dance idiom; instead, he utilized his own adaptation of Eastern Russian and Caucasian dance, giving them a most voluptuous treatment. The lyrical arms and sensuous body movements of the harem women were contrasted nicely by the primitive leaps of the male slaves which adhered to the context of the melodramatic libretto.[2]

Unfortunately, Fokine's Spectacular ballets have not remained popular despite their occasional revivals. This was due both to the inadequate physical and mental preparation of re-creating artists and to the lack of ample musical scores at the time the ballets were originally created. Combined with this was a change in what affected the audiences of succeeding generations as being sensual or sensational.[3]

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[1]Gadan and Millard, op. cit., p. 315.

[2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 106. [3]Ibid., p. 107.

Two significant works by Fokine falling under the classification of National were the "Polovetzian Dances" from the opera Prince Igor and Petrouchka. These ballets were derived from the customs and histories of particular countries--so the term "national" was used. [1]

The "Polovetzian Dances" from Prince Igor were first performed May 19, 1909, at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Combined with the talented dancers of the Diaghilev Ballet Russe were the music of Russian composer Alexandre Borodin and the décor and costumes of Nicholas Roerich, a leading Russian archeologist who was commissioned especially to design the adornments for Prince Igor. [2]

Through his subsequent study of Eastern Russian and Caucasian dance, Fokine had distilled the three most outstanding elements--passion, spontaneity and freedom--and disciplined them so that they could be contained within the stage setting. He contrived the choreography in such a way that each movement grew out of the musical context, distinguished clearly between the dances of the Persian slaves and their captors and showed the differences in the age groups of the characters. The result was the creation of three types of dance movements within a single style. Fokine structured the choreography so as to contrast these different styles of movement but allowed no dance to conclude until the finale. Therefore, the ballet did not appear as a group of separate divertisse-

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[1] Ibid. [2] Fokine, op. cit., p. 149.

ments but rather as a harmonious unit. He had united the primitive movements of the oriental dance with that of the traditional classical idiom.[1]

Fokine's passionate, barbaric conception for the warriors in the "Polovetzian Dances" restored the male dancer to his rightful place as an equal to that of the ballerina.[2] The virile qualities of Adolph Bolm, as presented in this ballet, brought back to ballet the male element that had been nearly eliminated over a half-century before during the Romantic Era.[3]

Petrouchka, a ballet which is also included under the National classification, was inspired by Russian history and customs. The actual time and place from which this work was devised was 1830 during the "Butter Week" Festival in St. Petersburg--an era that was closest to Fokine's own time and people. Petrouchka was first performed June 13, 1911, at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris by the Diaghilev Ballet Russe. The costumes and scenery were designed and executed by Benois, and it included among its original cast Vaslav Nijinsky, Adolph Bolm and Tamara Karsavina.[4]

The action revolved around the central figure, Petrouchka, a

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[1]Lawson, loc. cit. [2]Ibid., p. 108.

[3]Arnold Haskell, A Picture History of Ballet (London: Hulton Press, 1954), p. 21.

[4]Kirstein, op. cit., p. 277.

pathetic, ill-used sawdust puppet over whose soul his owner, the Charlatan, had no control. The theme of the libretto exemplified " . . . the struggle against evil of a human soul, embodied in a puppet," set against the background of a carnival.[1] Petrouchka possessed a strong plot and an ingenious combination of classical idiom sur la pointes, character dancing, mass-movement and pantomime.

As a partial fulfillment of Fokine's reformatory theories this ballet exemplified the close collaboration between choreographer, musician and designer. So close was this alliance that not one of the three appeared superior to the other two elements.[2] Fokine's choreography was most complex. The street scenes contained in the ballet were constructed of interlocking patterns of continuous action which provided the background for the tragedy of the Moor, Charlatan, Ballerina and Petrouchka.[3] Igor Stravinsky's music for Petrouchka was originally designed as four piano pieces to be played in concert. It was definitely "ballet music," a dynamic and dramatic score that was as important as the choreography. The combination of all these elements of production --choreography, music and setting--resulted in a complete performance in the highest sense.[4]

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[1]New York Public Library, Dance Collection, Stravinsky and the Dance (New York: New York Public Library, 1962), p. 42.

[2]Guest, op. cit., p. 74. [3]Nijinsky, op. cit., p. 127.

[4]Kirstein, loc. cit.

CHAPTER IV

LES SYLPHIDES--CLASSICO-ROMANTIC BALLET

This concluding chapter contains a detailed discussion of the third and final choreographic classification of Fokine's works, that of the Classico-Romantic ballet, and gives as the exemplifying work Les Sylphides. This ballet demonstrates the most complete embodiment of Fokine's suggested reforms on ballet and his particular choreographic style. The discussion will describe the evolutionary stages in the development of Les Sylphides through its two different and distinct versions with an examination of each according to concept, musical structure and choreographic design.

The era of Micheal Fokine has been designated "The Renaissance of Classical-Romanticism," and in no work is this more apparent than in his conception for the ballet Les Sylphides.[1] It actually evolved from an earlier ballet by Fokine called Chopinianna given as a benefit performance at the Maryinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, February 10, 1907.[2] The ballet was completely revised with a new conception and

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[1]Hall, World Dance, p. 87.

[2]David Drew, The Decca Book of Ballet (London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1958), p. 103.

with new choreography, but with the same name, for a charity performance, March 8, 1908.[1] It was not until the ballet was included in the Paris début of the Diaghilev Ballet Russe that, at Benois' suggestion, it was renamed Les Sylphides. This performance of the ballet with the same conception and choreographic structure as the revised version took place June 2, 1909, at the Théâtre du Châtelet.[2]

Chopin's music, because it was originally composed for piano, needed to be orchestrated. Alexandre Glazounov with the assistance of Anatole Liadov and Nicholas Tcherepnine effected the orchestration for the ballet's early conception. Unfortunately, they were unable to capture the mood of Chopin's music that was inherent in the piano pieces. When these musicians set themselves to the task of orchestration, they stamped the score with their own style. It was much too modern and lacked the simplicity and airiness of the original piano pieces.[3]

In the original libretto Fokine wanted to indicate Chopin's wide range of musical subject matter, his natural feelings and the Muse which inspired his compositions. The first scene, a Nocturne, was probably

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[1]Fokine, Fokine: Memoirs of a Ballet Master, p. 134.

[2]Drew, loc. cit.

[3]Alexandre Benois, Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet, trans. Mary Britnieva (London: Putnam, 1941), p. 203.

inspired by Chopin's experiences in the monastery of Valdemosa. While composing music at a piano, the portraying dancer was attacked by eerie visions of tormenting monks. Half-conscious, he was given strength by the appearance of his Muse, a dancer in white. The next scene was that of a Polish wedding which included a Mazurka. This was followed by a classical pas de deux in the "Romantic" style. The final scene took place in a ballroom and included within its structure two character dances, the Polonaise and Tarantella, danced in national costume.[1]

The new version of Chopinianna contained music re-orchestrated by Maurice Keller, except the classical pas de deux which was extracted --music and choreography--from the first version of Chopinianna orchestrated by Glazounov. The content of the new version was actually evolved and expanded from the waltz section of the first version which contained the classical pas de deux. The ballet was pure choreographic design, containing no plot or sequence of action. Because Fokine had interpolated no plot, this work became known as an abstract ballet--the first of its kind in the history of ballet.[2]

When the ballet was re-edited, the Mazurka, Polonaise and Tarantella, danced in national style and richly costumed, were eliminated. Instead, Fokine concentrated on the personification of Chopin's Muse as a romantic, sylph-like figure. In concentrating on this aspect of his

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[1]Lynham, Ballet Then and Now, p. 120.

[2]Fokine, op. cit., p. 129.

conception Fokine wanted to propound his novel style of classical dance which was expressive in line and content. The Muse was intended to represent in the tangible form of dance the structure, melody and rhythm of the music.[1]

Fokine saw many possible relationships of the male dancer in Les Sylphides--the masculine Muse who made Chopin's music possible, the spirit of love in a romantic, nostalgic mood.[2] Of this significance Fokine said, "I do not know. I made it for a danseur, who can soar like a spirit, but who has the strength to dance with the Wilis, and live to dance again."[3] This character called for a youth, a dreamer fascinated by the better things in life. Fokine's conception of this role was completely different from the male roles employed in ballets at that time, which required a show of virtuosity--tours en l'air and multiple pirouettes.[4]

Nijinsky, who was the original male Muse in Les Sylphides, needed no verbal coaching whatsoever for his role. Fokine would demonstrate the choreography, give a few corrections on technical steps and leave Nijinsky to assimilate and interpret the movements. The possession of this unique gift set him apart from other male dancers of that era. Nijinsky created one gesture in this ballet that became his favorite.

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[1]Lawson, A History of Ballet and Its Makers, p. 99.

[2]Ibid., p. 102. [3]Fokine, op. cit., p. 131. [4]Ibid., p. 132.

This was the brushing of the long locks of hair (worn during the time of Chopin and which Nijinsky adorned for the ballet) away from his face. The soft, languid gesture of the hand across the side of the face demonstrated the youth's wish to see more clearly the elusive Sylphides dancing around him.[1]

CHOREOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF LES SYLPHIDES

Les Sylphides was composed of seven dances, each having a characteristic content to accommodate its music. The unity of the ballet was obtained by the use of a leitmotive--the arabesque. Continuity and development of action were achieved within the structure of the ballet through its use. Fokine said concerning the significance of this leitmotive, "The arabesque is the focal point of every picture painted by the dancers within the framework of their colleagues' encircling groups."[2]

Fokine based his choreography on the principles of the classical dance idiom. He insisted that strict academic principles were to prevail from the waist down, but from the waist up there had to be freedom for expression through the arms, head and upper body. They had to comply with the scope of movement envisioned by the Romantic choreographers and had to be, at the same time, in accord with the quality, phrasing and

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[1]Ibid., p. 133. [2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 100.

content of the music.[1] Fokine always resented any reference to Les Sylphides as a "pure classical ballet," for he had conceived it as a revolt against the confines of classical rigidity and tradition.[2]

The "Nocturne" which was the first movement of the ballet was structured so that the movements of the corps de ballet echo those of the soloists. Fokine created this "play" between the soloists and corps de ballet so that the corps reflected the rhythmic pulse of the accompaniment, while the soloists responded to the melody, simulating its rise and fall in their movements. He called this rise and fall "the breath of the dance." On the whole the "Nocturne" was a very subtle movement and corresponded precisely with the musical impulse.[3]

In the succeeding "Valse" section, Fokine had given his solo dancer four duties. First, she had to present the rhythmic impulse of a waltz. She could do this by a waltz step, three changes of the feet, use of the arms and hands to accent three beats or beating one foot on the other in a three rhythm. Fokine used this pulsating of rhythm with other portions of the body as a means of giving more rhythmic sensitivity to his classical dance. Secondly, the dancer's movements had to follow the structure of the melodic line. All movements were to correspond to the rises and falls in the pitch of the melody and to the sustaining quality of the music.[4]

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[1] Ibid. [2] Drew, op. cit., p. 102. [3] Lawson, loc. cit. [4] Ibid.

Fokine allowed the musical structure of this entire dance to dictate the choreographic pattern. If a certain number of bars was repeated, then the movements contained in those bars were repeated. The overall structure of the "Valse" was composed of short four bar phrases which flowed one into the other. There was an imperfect cadence at the end of each group of four phrases or sixteen bars; therefore, the choreography was constructed so that the dancer repeated a combination of movements exactly three times, while in the fourth repeat the dancer prepared an introduction for the next phrase with a variation on the combination of movements in the first three repeats. The whole idea was carried through to the end, where the dancer prepared for the introduction of the next dancer. All of this gave continuity.[1]

The overall musical structure also dictated the floor pattern. The circular pattern of the waltz step was used as a motif which was envisaged in the overall floor pattern of the dance and in the movements contained in the dance, such as pirouettes and grand jetés en tournant, all circular movements.[2]

Karsavina, who performed as the soloist in this "Valse" section in the premiere presentation of Les Sylphides, possessed the particular romantic style necessary for the ultimate portrayal of this section. Even though she lacked the slimness and lightness of Pavlova, she was most

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[1] Ibid., p. 101. [2] Ibid.

effective in this role.[1]

In the "Girl's Mazurka," Fokine's purpose was to characterize the Polish flavor by means of the classical idiom. The rhythm of the mazurka contained an accent on the second beat, usually used to make a strong accent with the heel when performed in character style. Instead, Fokine, wishing to emphasize the dancer's gossamer lightness, had the dancer relevé in arabesque to show this accent. An interesting feature of this dance was the way in which the corps de ballet traced the soloist's flight through the air.[2]

Pavlova performed this role in the original production of this revised version. Fokine commenting on her performance said:

> Pavlova flew across the stage during the Mazurka. . . . Her talent consisted in her ability to create the impression not of jumping but of flying through the air. Pavlova had mastered the difference between jumping and soaring, which is something that can not be taught.[3]

Again in the "Man's Mazurka," Fokine wished to accent the subtle second beat that was characteristic of the mazurka. The movements of the male used traditional steps as a basis, but these appeared within the composition as mere ghosts of themselves. To show the accent on the second beat, the dancer used a downward pressure instead of the upward pressure seen in the preceding "Girl's Mazurka" so that

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[1]Fokine, op. cit., p. 130. [2]Lawson, loc. cit.

[3]Fokine, loc. cit.

there was a definite difference between the male and the female. Fokine always insisted upon this distinction. Though this downward pressure was used, the movements did not seem heavy; rather they showed the greater strength and characterization of the male.[1]

Fokine believed Nijinsky's part in Les Sylphides to be one of his best roles. He (Fokine) thought of it as a "role" and not a "part"--" . . . it did not consist merely of a series of steps. He was not a 'jumper' in it, but the personification of a poetic vision."[2]

In the "Prelude," Fokine wanted his dancer to be beckoned by the notes of the music and to respond to them with movements that echoed their call. The female soloist in this section portrayed the "conventional" gestures of "listening" through the movements of the arms--these movements being only suggestions of the conventional gestures.[3]

Olga Preobrajenska portrayed this section of Les Sylphides in its original production. In choreographing this particular segment Fokine made use of her exceptional ability to balance, as she could freeze on pointe on one foot. This variation contained no jumps, but through her uncanny sense of balance Preobrajenska was able to project the quality of ethereality--a quality reminiscent of the preceding Romantic Era. She did have one shortcoming, however, which continually

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[1]Lawson, op. cit., p. 102. [2]Fokine, op. cit., p. 131.

[3]Lawson, loc. cit.

vexed Fokine--her inclination to improvise. She would first perform the "Prelude" as originally created, then as an encore, she would improvise steps to the same music. This always chagrined Fokine, who forbade improvisation in his ballets, explaining:

> There are so many dances in this ballet that, if everyone repeated his number, there would be no concept left of the ballet as a unit. [1]

Following the "Prelude" came another waltz section which contained the classical pas de deux. This pas was the same that had inspired the creation of the novel concept on which this new version was based. Through this Fokine attempted to depict the different musical qualities innate in various types of movement to parallel the first sustained and later brilliant passages of Chopin's music. In the more sustained passages he utilized slowly developing lifts and turns; while, in the more brilliant passages precise and quicker relevés were used. As seen in the previous dances, the choreographic patterns paralleled those of the musical structure. [2]

The pas de deux was performed by Pavlova and Nijinsky. Alexandre Benois said concerning their performance:

> Their "dance duet" with its high, noiseless, soaring flights, full of tender delicate grace, conveyed the impression of a strange romance "beyond the grave," the hopeless love of bodiless spirits,

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[1] Fokine, op. cit., p. 130. [2] Lawson, loc. cit.

> who knew neither fiery embraces nor the sweetness of kisses, for whom all passion is replaced by sad caresses and soft tremulous flitting.[1]

The "Valse" section which followed the pas de deux was the terminating segment of the ballet and involved the entire cast--soloists and corps de ballet. It was similar in structure and assemblage of dancers to that of the first movement, the "Nocturne"--the ensemble danced together. The ballet concluded in the same pose from which it began.[2]

Each variation in Les Sylphides ended differently. In the "Mazurka," Pavlova ended by running off stage. The pas de deux terminated with Pavlova exiting pas de bourée sur la pointe--her back to the audience, while Nijinsky, following the final leap, fell onto one knee with arms extended as if to a vision. Preobrajenska finished the "Prelude" sur la pointe facing the audience with her arms extended to the orchestra as if beckoning them to play more flowing melodies. The varying exits from the stage were not calculated by Fokine; they just happened.[3]

Les Sylphides possessed an extremely sensitive balance between music and movement. Complete unity in this aspect demonstrated it to be the most musical of all ballets. This musicality was inherent in all of Fokine's works, always a thorough translation of musical phrases into

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[1]Benois, op. cit., p. 294. [2]Lawson, loc. cit.

[3]Fokine, op. cit., p. 131.

physical movement.[1] Due to this excellent musicality, Fokine was sensitive to every nuance in Chopin's music. The accents of the dancing were placed subtly throughout each section and throughout the ballet as a whole. Fokine's choreography for Les Sylphides vividly demonstrated his ideas on the treatment of music by the choreographer.[2]

SIMILARITIES TO ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN BALLET

Fokine designated Les Sylphides a "Reverie Romantique" because he wished to return ballet to what he considered the highest point of its development--the Golden Age of Romantic Ballet.[3] In devising its concept Fokine might well have been influenced by the Pas de Quatre of Jules Perrot (an occasion piece performed in London in 1845) and most definitely by Perrot's choreographic style.[4] The best passages reflected Romantic ballerina Carlotta Grisi's dancing for Perrot; however, in the corps and soloist sections there seemed to be reflections of the Romantic ballet La Sylphide (1832).[5]

In the creation of Les Sylphides, Fokine wished to capture the movement and style of the era of Marie Taglioni (1830-1850). But Taglioni had danced to traditional "ballet music" of that time by such composers as Labarre and Schneitzhoeffer. Fokine, instead, had chosen

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[1]Drew, op. cit., p. 102. [2]Hall, op. cit., p. 91.

[3]Fokine, op. cit., p. 129. [4]Hall, loc. cit. [5]Ibid.

music of a Romantic composer from the era of Romantic Ballet. During the epoch of Taglioni no maitre de ballet would have chosen music by Chopin because it did not fit the choreography of the period. However, Fokine decided Chopin's music was danceable, and through it he was inspired to create a new poetic choreographic style which began a new era in ballet.[1]

Fokine studied etchings and lithographs of famous ballerinas of the Romantic Era--Taglioni, Grisi, Cerrito--during his preparation for this new conception of Les Sylphides. He wished by this presentation to disprove the popular consensus that he rejected dancing sur la pointe, and that he desired to delete "old ballet" from existence. He understood dancing on pointe, but in a manner that differed from his contemporaries. In Romantic Ballet, for which the use of pointes had been created, point work was used to give the illusion of lightness, an ethereal quality, that was a desired effect in ballets created at that time. But through the years this initial purpose had been forgotten and replaced by the desire to use point work as a means of showing the strength of the ballerina. The Romantic ballerina's goal was the creation of "pure poetry" through dance to which the use of point work added greatly. Ballerinas in the epoch of Fokine sought only the demonstration of physical strength and endurance.[2]

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[1]Ibid. [2]Fokine, loc. cit.

Fokine worked as his predecessor, Perrot, in that he relied on the music for inspiration. Unfortunately and unlike Perrot, he could not subjugate his inspiration to the task of composing an entire ballet. The "Prelude" and the pas de deux seem to be the two sections that possessed the most successful renderings of the true Romantic style in which Les Sylphides was conceived. The choreography for these two sections was less difficult technically, but dictated more demands on the dancer's sense of style and poetic feeling. The "Valse" and two "Mazurkas" were more of a mixture of the Romantic style, inherent in the "Prelude" and pas de deux, and the traditional academic style of the present era.[1]

Through his subsequent study of the Romantic Period in ballet Fokine decided that all dancers in Les Sylphides should be costumed in white "tutus à la Taglioni." These consisted of long skirts extending to about mid-calf, constructed of white tulle and attached to a close-fitting white bodice. In an attempt to save money, the costumes were conceived most economically from previously used ballet costumes with the longest skirts. After these were selected and more material added to them, they were attached to the original bodices. All of the alterations were effected by Fokine with the cost coming to a meager twenty-five rubles.[2]

The costumes for this new version were designed after Bakst's

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[1]Hall, loc. cit. [2]Fokine, loc. cit.

conception of Pavlova's costume from the first version of Chopinianna. The hair was parted in the middle and tied in a low bun at the nape of the neck. A pink wreath of flowers was worn encircling the head. Every one of the Sylphides was dressed alike with no special treatment whatsoever of the costumes worn by the soloists. All this added to the visual unity of the ballet.

The costume for the male lead consisted of a black velvet jacket with a collar à l'enfant, a little tie at the neck, white tights and a wig of long curls. Benois, the designer of this costume, was not wholly satisfied with his creation. He likened its caricatured appearance to the troubadours which appeared on old, painted lamp-shades of the middle nineteenth century. Benois also created the scenery for the ballet which was inspired by the "mysterious ruins" that were typical of the Romantic Period décor.[1]

Les Sylphides was created in only three days--an excellent example of Fokine's successfully and hastily conceived ballets. Many of the corps de ballet sections were completed during the intermission just before the curtain was raised for its début. Fokine hummed the melodic lines and instructed his dancers in the poses he wished to fix. Serge Grigoriev, Régisseur Géneral of the Diaghilev Ballet Russe, begged him to hurry as the audience was becoming restless. Even

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[1]Benois, loc. cit.

though it was hastily created, Fokine never changed one step.[1]

Concerning his conception for Les Sylphides, Fokine comments, "My ballet is a romantic reverie, an idea to summon before you the spirit of that era."[2] Benois in his Reminiscences of the Russian Ballet alludes to the ballet as:

> . . . the languid vision of spirits of dead maidens, dancing their dreary dances among the moonlit ruins and mouseleums [sic]. . . . In Chopin's music, through sad tears of a tormented soul, there appears sometimes the strange yet infinitely touching image of a pale youth who is danced to death by the spirits of the cemetery.[3]

Fokine often had the occasion to enscribe the synopsis of Les Sylphides, as have other critics and authors, but he explains:

> I have read many descriptions of this ballet in programs compiled by experts--and yet I have never been able to find a satisfactory verbal elucidation of this ballet.[4]

The excitement of Fokine's "Romanticism" was dead by 1913, due to the inception of a novel and short-lived epoch in the evolution of ballet--the Period of Expressionism. The initiator of this brief, succeeding movement was none other than Vaslav Nijinsky, the dancer who had previously been the foremost exponent of Fokine's choreographic labors. Through his creation in 1912, of L'Aprés-midi d'une Faune, Nijinsky

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[1]DeMille, The Book of the Dance, p. 214.

[2]Lawson, op. cit., p. 102. [3]Benois, op. cit., pp. 293-294.

[4]Fokine, op. cit., p. 131.

had ushered in an era whose theories, in essence, demonstrated an overt neglect of all that had been wonderful in the Classical-Romantic tradition revived by Fokine. Nijinsky, in his ballet, advocated a reduction of dance to the most basic elements of movement embodied in a simple walk or run. He purposely structured his choreography so that it was void of any grace or fluidity and replaced these aesthetic qualities with cold, angular movements of the upper body, arms and head. Not only was his choreographic style void of the stylistic nuances that contributed to visual beauty in dance, but it was also depleted of any acceptable form of technique that could classify it as a dance form. This was exactly the reason that this new movement did not last.[1]

Nijinsky's Expressionism endured only a short time, evolving no further in the years that followed its inception. However, it did precipitate two significant events--Fokine's subsequent break with Diaghilev and his company and the end of his productivity as a choreographer. These artistic trends that prevailed at the time in which he was creating his major works, combined with this break, prevented Fokine from realizing his ideas and dreams in their entirety. By the time the Revolution of 1917 had struck, Fokine had lost all of his collaborators and his faith and found little opportunity to choreograph, except

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[1]Hall, op. cit., p. 94.

for a few charity performances.[1]

But the Classical-Romantic ballets of Fokine have survived, due to their basic and universal tenor which is the very essence of Romanticism. The quintessence of romantic feeling was shown even more true through Fokine's ballets than through those of the Romantic Era.[2]

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[1]Roslavleva, Era of the Russian Ballet, p. 177.

[2]Haskell, A Picture History of Ballet, p. 21.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Micheal Fokine was truly one of the great personalities in the history of dance. His reformatory theories and choreographic innovations contributed immensely to the development of ballet as an expressive art form. He utilized the technical principles--the fundamentals of dance--molded them, injected them with emotion and meaning, and created a dance idiom that laid the foundation for ballet of the twentieth century.

Even as a youth Fokine was preparing himself for his eventual career as an innovator and choreographer. The initial influences that spurred him in the direction of the theatre lay in the endowments of Fokine's immediate family. Each member bestowed upon him an individual and vital legacy that contributed to Fokine's intellectual, physical and artistic development. Also included in this preparatory period were the acquisition of academic and artistic knowledge and the complete education in every idiom of dance. Added to this was the opportunity for active application of his profession in the realms of performance and instruction. All of these endowments developed Fokine into an intelligent and objective artist with the capacity to perceive and correct the errors

of a tradition-bound art form.

Through his reforms Fokine cleared away a half-century of dead convention and re-established dance as a living art. He believed that dance had become stagnant and that, if it remained in this condition, creative expression would vanish. Isadora Duncan's philosophies had little effect on Fokine's reformatory theories. He sympathized with Duncan's efforts to revitalize dance, but he never accepted her ignorance of academic rules. Duncan advocated the annihilation of previous artistic achievements, while Fokine, in his wisdom, realized that there could only be evolution and not destruction in art. The two factions influenced each other but retained their autonomy. The essence of Fokine's whole reform was based on the realization that art should be expressive and promote the use of technical virtuosity not as an end in itself but as an instrument to attain this total expressiveness in dance.

Fokine's ballets were the tangible results of his reformatory measures and were collectively termed ballets d'époque--a decorative resurrection of time passed. Fokine's styles of movement and subject matter were greater than those of any preceding choreographer. He used the classical technique as a basis for all his choreographic works; however, he treated these classical steps with a novel musicality and subtlety so as to produce the complete expressiveness of the dancer. Fokine utilized the physical traits and personalities of his dancers as an artist would use color, shaping and re-shaping to a particular capability.

Fokine's first choreographic experiments were the transitory works Acis and Galatea (1905), Eunice (1907), and Le Cygne (1905). While these were only intermediate products, their success indicated to Fokine that the art of choreography would best enable him to propound his reformatory theories.

The major works of Fokine fall into three categories--Spectacular, National and Classico-Romantic--each differing according to the origin of their subject matter. The Spectacular ballets were inspired by literary sources that possessed dramatic action and included Une Nuit d'Egypte (1908) and Scheherazade (1910). The National ballets were derived from the customs and histories of particular countries and incorporated the "Polovetzian Dances" from Prince Igor (1909) and Petrouchka (1911).

The era of Fokine was called "The Renaissance of Classical-Romanticism," and the conception for his ballet Les Sylphides to music by Fredric Chopin made this designation most relevant. The ballet had two distinctly different versions: Chopinianna (1907) and Chopinianna (1908); the latter one was renamed Les Sylphides (1909). While the original conception of the ballet indicated Chopin's wide range of musical subject, the revised conception demonstrated a revival of the spirit of the Romantic Era in ballet. Fokine interpolated no plot, which resulted in the creation of the first abstract ballet in history.

Les Sylphides was composed of seven dances, each possessing

a unique content to coincide with the music. Through its creation Fokine wanted to propound his novel style of classical dance which was expressive in line and content and to represent the structure, melody and rhythm of the music. The alliance between the music and movement was so close that the physical movement appeared as a thorough translation of the musical phrases.

Fokine's choreographic productivity began to regress in 1913, due to Nijinsky's introduction of Expressionism. Although this movement was short-lived, it had a devastating and irreversible effect on Fokine's artistic development. Even though he was at his artistic peak for only nine years, Fokine's expertise in his field made it possible for him to effect an inestimable amount of influence over the direction of dance in the years that followed his choreographic regression. The resulting revival of ballet as a vital, expressive art form was made possible through the reformatory theories and choreographic contributions of Micheal Fokine.

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